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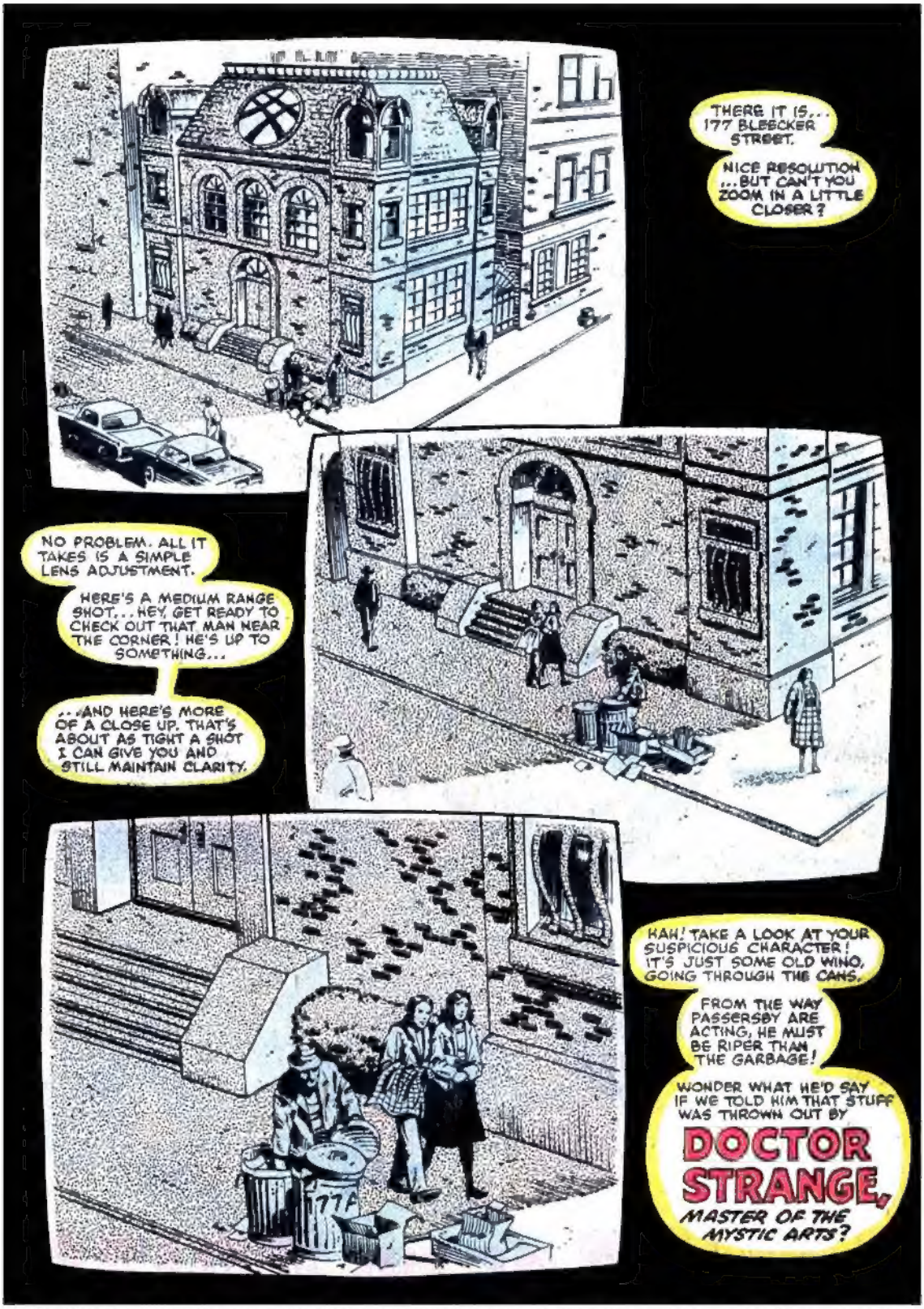
THERE IT IS... 177 BLEECKER STREET.
NICE RESOLUTION ...BUT CAN'T YOU ZOOM IN A LITTLE CLOSER?
NO PROBLEM. ALL IT TAKES IS A SIMPLE LENS ADJUSTMENT.
HERE'S A MEDIUM RANGE SHOT... HEY, GET READY TO CHECK OUT THAT MAN NEAR THE CORNER! HE'S UP TO SOMETHING...
...AND HERE'S MORE OF A CLOSE UP. THAT'S ABOUT AS TIGHT A SHOT I CAN GIVE YOU AND STILL MAINTAIN CLARITY.
177
HAH! TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR SUSPICIOUS CHARACTER! IT'S JUST SOME OLD WINO, GOING THROUGH THE CANS.
FROM THE WAY PASSERSBY ARE ACTING, HE MUST BE RIPER THAN THE GARBAGE!
WONDER WHAT HE'D SAY IF WE TOLD HIM THAT STUFF WAS THROWN OUT BY
DOCTOR STRANGE,
MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS?

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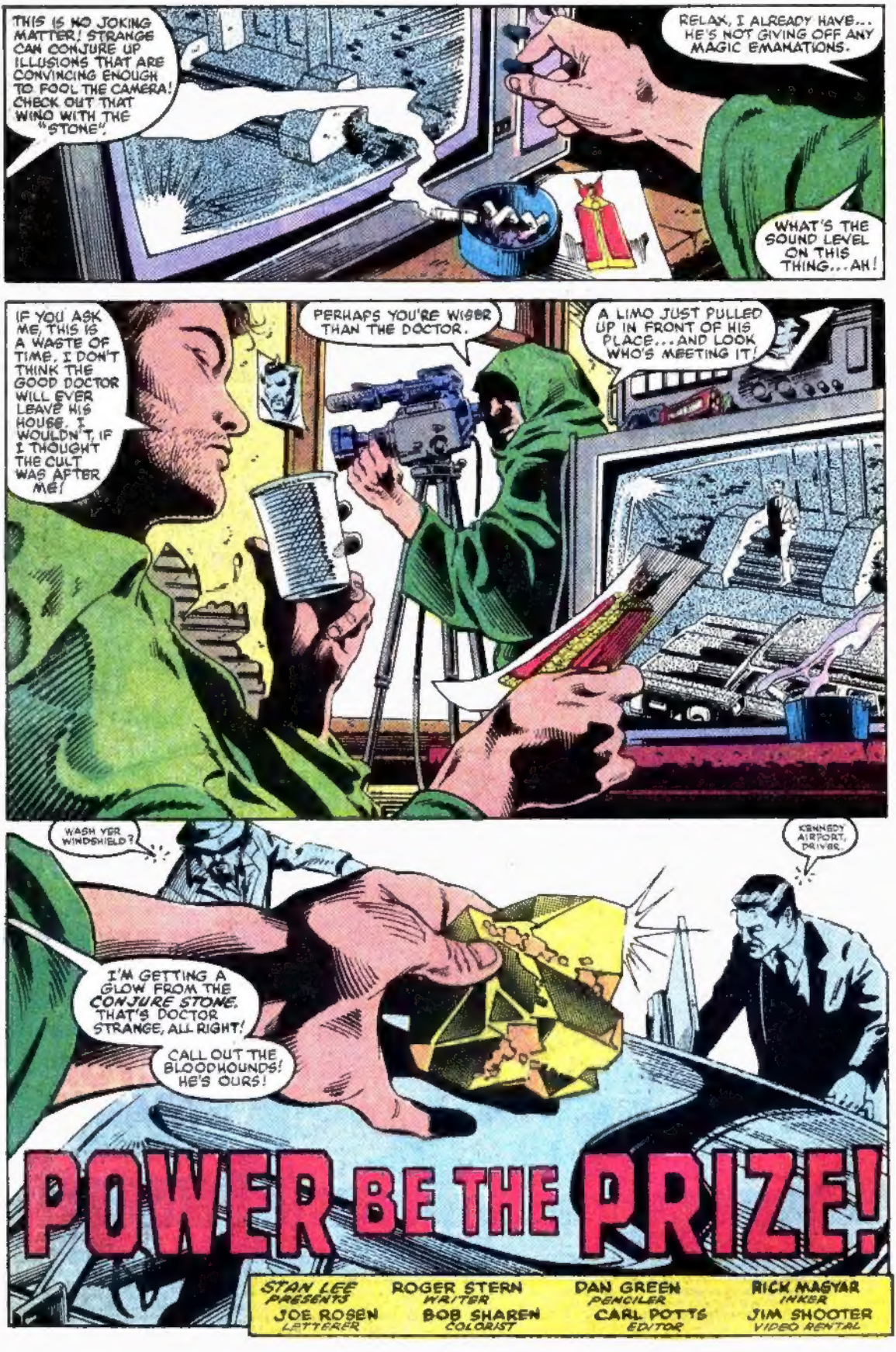
THIS IS NO JOKING MATTER! STRANGE CAN CONJURE UP ILLUSIONS THAT ARE CONVINCING ENOUGH TO FOOL THE CAMERA! CHECK OUT THAT WINO WITH THE "STONE".
RELAX, I ALREADY HAVE... HE'S NOT GIVING OFF ANY MAGIC EMANATIONS.
WHAT'S THE SOUND LEVEL ON THIS THING... AH!
IF YOU ASK ME, THIS IS A WASTE OF TIME. I DON'T THINK THE GOOD DOCTOR WILL EVER LEAVE HIS HOUSE. I WOULDN'T, IF I THOUGHT THE CULT WAS AFTER ME!
PERHAPS YOU'RE WISER THAN THE DOCTOR.
A LIMO JUST PULLED UP IN FRONT OF HIS PLACE... AND LOOK WHO'S MEETING IT!
WASH YER WINDSHIELD?
KENNEDY AIRPORT, DRIVER.
I'M GETTING A GLOW FROM THE CONJURE STONE. THAT'S DOCTOR STRANGE, ALL RIGHT!
CALL OUT THE BLOODHOUNDS! HE'S OURS!
POWER BE THE PRIZE!
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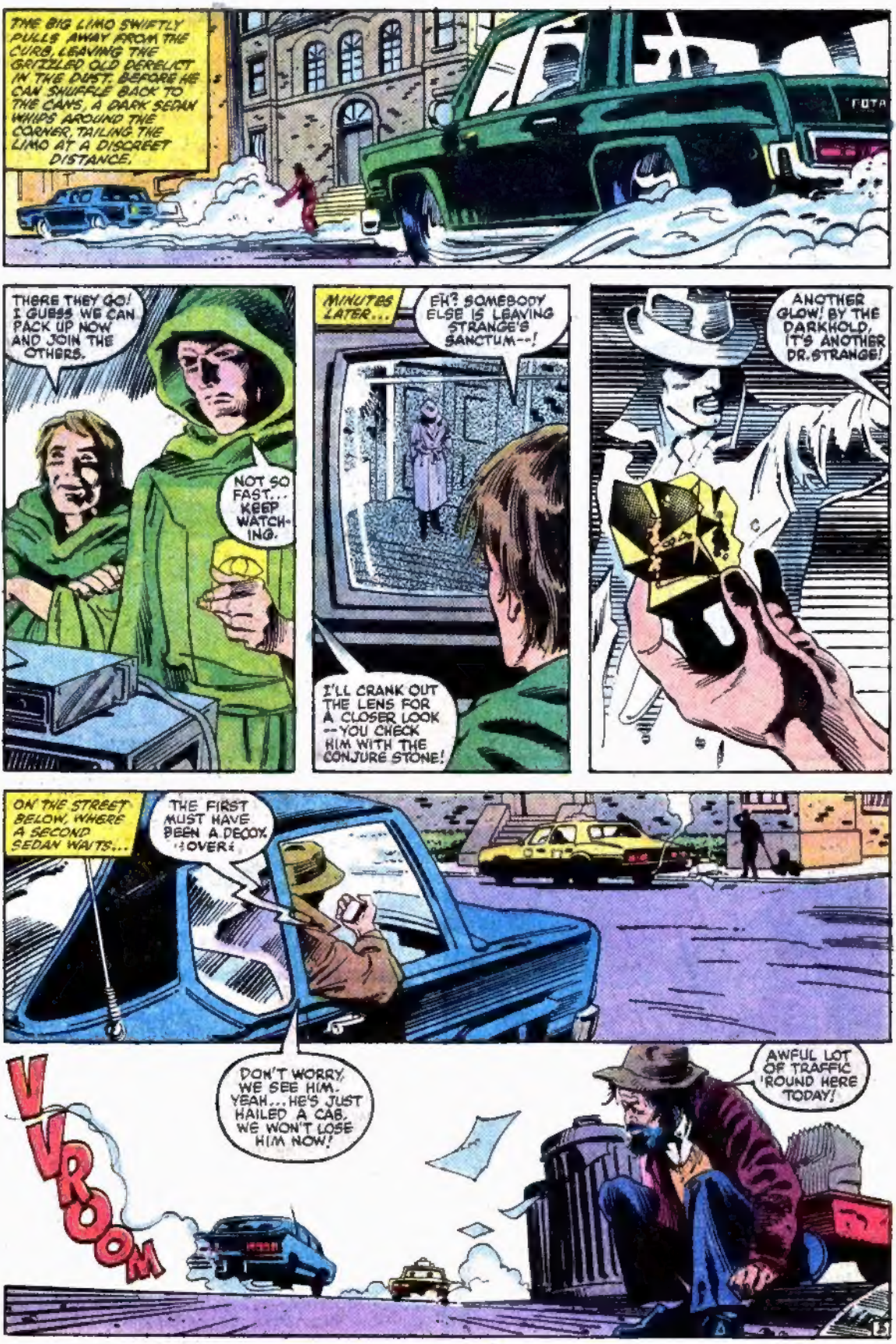

THE BIG LIMO SWIFTLY PULLS AWAY FROM THE CURB, LEAVING THE GRIZZLED OLD DERELICT IN THE DUST. BEFORE HE CAN SHUFFLE BACK TO THE CANS, A DARK SEDAN WHIPS AROUND THE CORNER, TAILING THE LIMO AT A DISCREET DISTANCE.
THERE THEY GO! I GUESS WE CAN PACK UP NOW AND JOIN THE OTHERS.
NOT SO FAST... KEEP WATCHING.
MINUTES LATER...
EH? SOMEBODY ELSE IS LEAVING STRANGE'S SANCTUM--!
I'LL CRANK OUT THE LENS FOR A CLOSER LOOK --YOU CHECK HIM WITH THE CONJURE STONE!
ANOTHER GLOW! BY THE DARKHOLD, IT'S ANOTHER DR. STRANGE!
ON THE STREET BELOW, WHERE A SECOND SEDAN WAITS...
THE FIRST MUST HAVE BEEN A DECOY. OVER.
VROOM
DON'T WORRY. WE SEE HIM. YEAH... HE'S JUST HAILED A CAB. WE WON'T LOSE HIM NOW!
AWFUL LOT OF TRAFFIC 'ROUND HERE TODAY!

SHORTLY, AT PENN STATION...
HE'S TAKING THE GOLDEN GATE SPECIAL!
THEN SO ARE WE!
THE TALL, TRENCHCOATED FIGURE SINKS INTO A SEAT, KEEPING HIS HAT TURNED LOW AS THE TRAIN PULLS OUT OF THE STATION.
IT ISN'T UNTIL THE TRAIN IS HALFWAY THROUGH NEW JERSEY THAT HE LEAVES HIS SEAT, HEADING FOR THE DINING CAR.
SORRY, BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO MISS LUNCH, TODAY, DOCTOR!
WHA--?
THIS TRAIN MAKES A STOP AT PHILLY. WE'RE ALL GOING TO GET OFF THERE AND HAVE A LITTLE TALK ABOUT A MISSING BOOK!
AND JUST SO YOU WON'T TRY ANY MAGIC TRICKS, I'LL TAKE THIS MYSTICAL TRINKET!
SNAP
YOU'VE MADE A MISTAKE, I'M NO DOCTOR--
--I ONLY WORK FOR ONE!
WHAT THE--?! THIS ISN'T THE SORCERER! IT'S THAT BUSINESS SECRETARY OF HIS... SARA WHATSHERNAME?
4

"WHATSHERNAME"? WELL, I LIKE THAT!
KRAK
WHUD
GEEHH!
CONDUCTOR! CONDUCTOR!
YES, MA'AM? IS SOMETHING WRONG?
IS THERE EVER! MY NAME'S SARA WOLFE... I WAS TRYING TO GET TO THE DINING CAR--
--WHEN THOSE TWO STRANGE MEN TRIED TO GRAB ME!
OH, THEY DID, DID THEY?
UH-OH.
YOU STAY RIGHT HERE, MS. WOLFE--
--I'LL TAKE CARE OF THESE PERVERTS!
MEANWHILE, JUST MINUTES OUT OF JFK INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, ABOARD A FLIGHT BOUND FOR ACAPULCO--
WHEW! I'LL HAVE TO THANK WONG FOR THOSE SELF-DEFENSE POINTERS HE GAVE ME!
LOOKS LIKE I WAS A SUCCESSFUL DECOY! THAT MAGIC PENDANT POC GAVE ME WORKED LIKE A CHARM! OUCH! WHAT AN AWFUL PUN!
5

--THE FIRST DR. STRANGE MAKES HIS WAY DOWN THE AISLE TO THE REAR LAVATORIES...
OH, NO! NOT BOTH OF THEM!
OCCUPIED
BUT THE NEXT MOMENT, BOTH DOORS OPEN AND...
DON'T TRY ANYTHING! YOUR MAGIC'S NO GOOD AGAINST US!
THAT'S RIGHT...WE'RE "PROTECTED."
WE HAVE SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU, PAL!
OH, REALLY? WELL--
--I HAVE A FEW FOR YOU! SKY-MARSHALL, BOYS!
DROP THE KNIFE AND KEEP THOSE HANDS HIGH!
LOOKS LIKE YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT THAT THREAT ON YOUR LIFE, DOCTOR.
UH, YES. I MUST COMMEND YOU--!
DON'T MENTION IT, SIR. THESE CLOWNS MUST HAVE BEEN CRAZY TO TRY SOMETHING UP HERE!
WELL, THAT WAS EXCITING.
NOW THAT I HAVE SOME PRIVACY, I THINK I'LL REMOVE THIS BAUBLE AND CHECK THE DAMAGES. JUST A YANK--
--AND PRESTO! I'M MORGANA BLESSING AGAIN! AND NOT A HAIR OUT OF PLACE!
I'M GLAD I WAS ABLE TO TALK STEPHEN INTO LETTING ME HELP WITH HIS LITTLE DECEPTION. WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR, AFTER ALL?
HE CERTAINLY PLANS FOR EVERYTHING--ARRANGING FOR THAT SKY-MARSHALL TO BE ON BOARD AND ALL. BUT WHAT DID THAT MAN MEAN WHEN HE SAID HE WAS "PROTECTED"?
AT THAT MOMENT, BACK IN NEW YORK CITY...
KEEP WATCHING. THERE'S A CHANCE THAT BOTH OF THEM WERE DECOYS.
BUT WHAT DO WE DO IF A THIRD SORCERER SHOWS UP? WE'VE SENT OUT ALL OUR TRACKING TEAMS...
6

...AND THEY WERE THE ONLY ONES WHO HAD BEEN TREATED BY THE INNER CIRCLE WITH SPELLS OF PROTECTION. IT TAKES TOO MUCH OUT OF THE INNER CIRCLE TO TREAT ANY MORE.
IF ONE ACTS FAST ENOUGH, THOSE SPELLS AREN'T NECESSARY. BESIDES, THEY ONLY OFFER A MOMENT'S RESPITE ...THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE...
NOK NOK
YES? WHAT DO YOU WANT?
I'M LOOKIN' FOR LOUIE!
NO LOUIE IN HERE!
DON' LIE TO ME! WHERE'S LOUIE?!
HEY!
WHAT A STENCH!
GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE--!
YOU!
DOCTOR STRANGE!
BOLTS OF BEDEVILMENT 'ROUND YOU NOW SWEEP THAT FALL YOU SHALL IN MORPHEAN SLEEP!
YES! AND I DON'T LIKE PEOPLE SPYING ON MY HOUSE!
INTERESTING! THE CULT ENTRUSTED THEM WITH A CRUDE BUT EFFECTIVE CONJURE STONE. I WAS WISE IN DECIDING UPON A NON-MAGICAL DISGUISE FOR MYSELF--
--AND LEAVING MY ENCHANTED AMULET AND CAPE WITH WONG, I'D BEST JOIN HIM AND THE OTHERS NOW. THESE TWO WON'T BE BOTHERING ANYONE FOR AT LEAST 24 HOURS.
ZZZ ZZZ

SOON, IN ONE OF THE CITY'S LESS INVITING NEIGHBORHOODS...
IMPORT-EXPO
FURIOUS 5
NOK
NOK
GOOD EVENING, WONG. HAVE HANNIBAL KING AND HIS FRIENDS ARRIVED YET?
YES, MASTER. WHAT OF SARA ...AND MS. BLESSING?
I CHECKED WITH EACH TELEPATHICALLY ON THE WAY HERE. BOTH ARE FINE.
GOOD EVENING, GENTLEMEN. I HOPE YOU'LL FORGIVE MY RATHER AROMATIC DISGUISE. I ASSURE YOU, IT WAS QUITE NECESSARY.
I AM DR. STEPHEN STRANGE. HANNIBAL, WOULD YOU CARE TO HANDLE THE REST OF THE INTRODUCTIONS?
YEAH, PARDON MY MANNERS, DOC. THE CARROT-TOP OVER THERE IS FRANK DRAKE. HE'S ACTUALLY RELATED TO THE CREEP WE'RE AFTER.
DISTANTLY, KING! IF I'D HAD ANY CHOICE, I WOULDN'T HAVE PICKED DRACULA FOR AN ANCESTOR!
I BELIEVE IT! THE BIG DUDE HERE WITH THE PHOTO-SENSITIVE GOGGLES AND THE WOODEN KNIVES GOES BY THE NAME OF BLADE.
PLEASED TO MEET YA, DOC. Y'KNOW I'VE BEEN TAKIN' DOWN VAMPIRES SINCE I WAS A KID...
...FROM WHAT HANNIBAL TELLS US, YOU WANT TO TAKE AWAY MY BUSINESS. SOUNDS GOOD TO ME.
ME, TOO, DOCTOR-- ESPECIALLY IF IT MEANS WIPING OUT DRACULA. HE'S TAKEN TOO MANY LIVES-- KILLED TOO MANY CLOSE FRIENDS.
GENTLEMEN, FROM WHAT I HAVE RECENTLY LEARNED, I BELIEVE THAT NOT ONLY CAN DRACULA BE PERMANENTLY LAID TO REST, BUT THAT THE CURSE OF VAMPIRISM CAN BE FOREVER BANISHED FROM THE EARTH!
AS I'M SURE YOU'RE AWARE, DRACULA HAS RISEN ONCE MORE AS THE HEAD OF A CULT CALLED THE DARKHOLDERS. MOREOVER, HE IS USING THIS CULT TO MYSTICALLY EMPOWER HIMSELF TO A POINT OF PRACTICAL INVINCIBILITY.
8

HIS CULT HAS BASED THEIR SPELLS ON WRITINGS FROM A CURSED BOOK CALLED THE DARKHOLD IF DRACULA SHOULD EVER POSSESS THE ACTUAL BOOK ITSELF, HE WOULD BE UNSTOPPABLE. BUT THE DARKHOLD ALSO CARRIES THE SEEDS OF DRACULA'S DESTRUCTION.
I DISCOVERED THIS UPON FINDING THE DARKHOLD SCANT NIGHTS AGO. UNFORTUNATELY, I WAS FORCED TO USE MY MAGIC TO TRANSPORT THE BOOK FAR AWAY, TO KEEP IT OUT OF DRACULA'S GRASP.*
HOWEVER, I KNOW NOW THAT IF WE CAN RECOVER THE DARKHOLD AND PREPARE THE PROPER RITUALS, MANKIND NEED NEVER FEAR THE VAMPIRE AGAIN. I WILL NEED YOUR HELP IN THIS. I MUST WARN YOU, THERE IS GREAT DANGER INVOLVED — ESPECIALLY FOR MR. KING.
*LAST ISSUE.
YOU MEAN, BECAUSE I AM A VAMPIRE, RIGHT? LOOK, I NEVER ASKED FOR THESE FANGS! IF HELPING YOU WILL KEEP SOMEBODY ELSE FROM GETTING THE BITE, NOTHING WILL STOP ME FROM LENDING A HAND.
THAT GOES FOR ALL OF US, DOC.
VERY WELL. BUT WE MUST MOVE SWIFTLY.
SOMETIME LATER, A SUPERSONIC JETLINER SLICES THROUGH THE EVENING SKIES, BEARING FIVE BRAVE MEN EASTWARD...
IF ONLY RACHEL AND I HADN'T BROKEN UP, I MIGHT HAVE BEEN THERE TO SAVE HER FROM DRACULA.* "IF ONLY..." SOMETIMES I THINK THAT'S THE THEME OF MY LIFE.
BEEN NEARLY THIRTY YEARS SINCE A VAMPIRE KILLED MY MAMA. SEEMS LIKE I'VE BEEN TRYING TO PAY 'EM BACK FOR MOST OF MY LIFE. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE LAST VAMPIRE'S GONE?
I'M SURE THAT DRACULA HAS MORE MINIONS THAN JUST THOSE WHO WERE AFTER ME. IF HIS MEN SHOULD FIND THE DARKHOLD BEFORE WE RECOVER IT--!
IT IS WELL THAT SARA WILL BE IN SAN FRANCISCO, AND AWAY FROM THE DANGER.
WE HAD TO WAIT FOR THIS EVENING FLIGHT, ON ACCOUNT OF MY WEAKNESS TO SUNLIGHT. I HOPE I HAVEN'T DELAYED US TOO MUCH.
*SEE X-MEN ANNUAL #6.

BOSTON, A FEW HOURS LATER...
AS DAWN ILLUMINATES AN OLD DE-CONSECRATED CHURCH--
--ITS PRESENT LORD AND MASTER DEFIANTLY WELCOMES THE RAYS OF THE MORNING SUN.
SHINE ON, SUN! SHINE FOR ALL YOU'RE WORTH! YOU WILL NOT SEND DRACULA SCURRYING FOR COVER THIS DAY ...OR EVER AGAIN!
NO LONGER MUST THE LORD OF THE UNDEAD SHUN YOUR RADIANCE! THE SPELLS OF MY FOLLOWERS HAVE SEEN TO THAT!
TO YOUR FEET, MY INNER CIRCLE! I'VE LEFT YOU WITH MINDS ENOUGH TO ACCOMPLISH THAT!
YES... MASTER...
AS... YOU ...C.. C... COMMAND...
THE WORDS COME ONLY WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY, DON'T THEY, MY FOOLISH DARKHOLDERS? HAH! I AM NOT SURPRISED.
THE RITUALS YOU DEVISED AT MY DIRECTION, FROM THE FRAGMENTED CODEX OF THE DARKHOLD WE HAD, SERVED BUT TO BEND YOUR WILLS— TO DRAIN YOUR PSYCHES — TO FUEL MY OWN MYSTIC RESTORATION!
HOW IRONIC THAT YOU WOULD-BE DARKHOLDERS HAVE COME TO BE THE THRALLS OF A VAMPIRE.
ONCE, MY KIND WERE LITTLE MORE THAN SLAVES TO SUCH AS YOU. BUT THAT WAS MILLENIA AGO...

"IN THAT PRE-CATACLYSMIC AGE, BEFORE THEIR GREAT CONTINENT FELL BENEATH THE OCEAN'S WAVES, A SMALL CIRCLE OF ATLANTEAN MYSTICS DISCOVERED THE INDESTRUCTIBLE PARCHMENTS WHICH HAD BEEN LEFT ON EARTH BY THE DEMON CHTHON!
"THOSE MYSTICS GATHERED THE PARCHMENTS TOGETHER ON THE SCROLL THAT BECAME KNOWN AS THE DARKHOLD... THE BOOK OF SINS! THEY WERE THE FIRST DARKHOLDERS --AND, OH, WHAT POWER THEY WIELDED!
"THEY WOULD HAVE RULED THE WORLD, HAD THEY NOT MADE ONE TRAGIC ERROR.
"USING THE DARKHOLD, THEY CREATED A SPELL WHICH CAUSED THEIR FALLEN ENEMIES TO WALK THE EARTH AGAIN AS UNDEAD VAMPIRES! THE DARKHOLDERS RATHER FANCIED USING THEIR UNDEAD FOES AS SOLDIER-SERVANTS, TO ENFORCE THEIR PLANS OF CONQUEST.
"BUT THE SPELL HAD MADE THE VAMPIRES MORE POWERFUL THAN WAS PLANNED. THEY EVENTUALLY TURNED UPON THE DARKHOLDERS, AND SLEW THEM BEFORE PARTAKING OF THEIR BLOOD.
"THUS DID THE FIRST DARKHOLDERS DIE OUT, WHILE THE FIRST VAMPIRES LEFT THE DOOMED CONTINENT OF ATLANTIS."

EVER SINCE THAT TIME, THE EARTH HAS KNOWN THE TOUCH OF VAMPIRISM. AS FOR THE DARKHOLD, IT WAS LOST AND FOUND COUNTLESS TIMES.
IN THE SIXTH CENTURY A.D., THE PARCHMENTS WERE BOUND INTO A BOOK BY THE SORCERESS MORGAN LE FAY. FROM THIS BOOK WERE COPIES MADE...INFERIOR COPIES WHICH SURVIVE TO THIS DAY ONLY IN FRAGMENTARY FORM.
SUCH FRAGMENTS WERE FOUND BY YOU...AND I!
IT WAS MY OWN RECENT EXPERIENCES WITH SORCERY WHICH LED TO MY DISCOVERY OF THESE TRUTHS -- AND MADE ME AWARE OF YOU.
YOU WERE LITTLE MORE THAN DABBLERS IN THE MYSTIC ARTS WHEN I FOUND YOU! I ENCOURAGED YOU, GAVE YOU A FOCUS FOR YOUR RITUALS, THAT I MIGHT BENEFIT FROM THE POWER YOU SOUGHT!
AH, AND I HAVE! YOUR SPELLS HAVE MADE ME MORE POWERFUL, MORE VITAL IN UNDEATH THAN EVER BEFORE! NOW ALL I NEED IS THE ORIGINAL DARKHOLD ITSELF --
--AND I SHALL TRULY BECOME AS ONE IMMORTAL!
YOUR UNDERLINGS SEARCH FOR THE DARKHOLD...LET ME SEE THEIR PROGRESS!
AT DRACULA'S COMMAND, THE ENTHRALLED INNER CIRCLE FORMS A MYSTIC PORTAL CAPABLE OF VIEWING ANY OF THE CULT'S ACTIVITIES
BUT...
WHAT IS THIS?
TWO...OF OUR OUTER CIRCLE...HAVE BEEN RENDERED UNCONSCIOUS, MASTER.
I CAN SEE THAT! WHERE IS THIS?
OUR NEW YORK OUTPOST...THE ONE ESTABLISHED...TO KEEP WATCH OVER... DR. STRANGE.
12

STRANGE!
YOU IDIOTS! HAVE YOU LOST YOUR SENSES, AS WELL AS YOUR WILLS? A DOZEN SUCH AS THESE COULD NOT HANDLE THE SORCERER!
IT MUST HAVE BEEN CHILD'S PLAY FOR HIM TO BLUDE THEM! NOW HE IS ABROAD IN THE LANDS--
--AND IF I KNOW HIM, HE'S ON HIS WAY TO RECOVERING THE DARKHOLD, TO TURN ITS POWER AGAINST ME! IF ANYONE CAN, IT IS HE!
MAINTAIN YOUR RITUAL POSITIONS! I MUST MAKE USE OF YOU DIRECTLY!
DRAWING UPON THE MYSTIC ENERGIES HARNESSED BY THE CIRCLE--
--DRACULA BEGINS TO BROADCAST A POWERFUL TELEPATHIC MESSAGE.
HEAR ME ALL YOU WHO OWE ALLEGIANCE TO DRACULA!
AROUND THE WORLD THE MESSAGE TRAVELS, HEARD ONLY BY THOSE MEN AND WOMEN -LIVING, AS WELL AS UNDEAD-- WHO RECOGNIZE DRACULA AS THEIR MASTER!
I MUST FIND THE MAN KNOWN AS DR STRANGE
AND, IN A SMALL ROMANIAN VILLAGE NOT FAR FROM BUCHAREST--
--AN OLD MAN STIRRS, LISTENING TO THE WORDS THAT HE ALONE, OF ALL THE LITTLE TAVERN'S PATRONS CAN HEAR.
. LEAN OF BODY IS HE, WITH GREY EYES, A MOST DISTINCTIVE MOUSTACHE... HIS HAIR JET BLACK, BUT STREAKED WITH WHITE AT BOTH TEMPLES
IF YOU HAVE SEEN HIM, ACKNOWLEDGE NOW, I SHALL HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS
I... I SAW SUCH A MAN! YES, HE WAS A YANKEE .. WITH FOUR OTHERS.

"THEY STOPPED HERE BRIEFLY, BEFORE PUSHING ON INTO THE MOUNTAINS IN A HEAVILY LADEN TRUCK. BUT THAT WAS HOURS AGO..."
WONG, ARE YOU SURE THIS IS THE WAY?
THIS IS THE ROAD THE MASTER INDICATED, MR. DRAKE.
IT'S PRETTY WEIRD, YOU KNOW... THE DOCTOR SENT THIS DARKHOLD INTO THE TRANSYLVANIA ALPS, LESS THAN A HUNDRED MILES FROM CASTLE DRACULA!
THE MASTER WAS FORCED TO ACT QUICKLY--
--AND SO HE CHOSE TO TRANSPORT THE BOOK TO A PLACE WHERE ITS VILE PRESENCE WOULD BE DISGUISED BY THE OTHER EVIL AURAS AROUND... SUCH A PLACE IS THE LAIR OF HIS LATE FOE, BARON MORDO!
YOU MAKE THIS MORDO CHAP SOUND AS BAD AS DRACULA HIMSELF!
IN HIS OWN WAY, MR. DRAKE...IN HIS OWN WAY.
MEANWHILE, IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK...
I'M TELLING YOU, I'M FINE, BLADE! IT'S ONLY DIRECT SUNLIGHT THAT MAKES ME UNCOMFORTABLE.
FOR A GUY WHO LISTS HIS OCCUPATION AS "VAMPIRE SLAYER," YOU'RE SURE MOTHER-HENNING ME TODAY! WHAT GIVES?
MAYBE I'VE JUST BEEN DOING SOME HEAVY THINKING IN THE LAST FEW HOURS
THIS STUFF YOU GOT PLANNED, STRANGE--THIS HOCUS-POCUS TRICK THAT'S GONNA WIPE OUT ALL THE VAMPIRES--IT INCLUDES HANNIBAL TOO...DOESN'T IT?
I M AFRAID THERE IS THAT POSS BILITY YES
14

AS I EXPLAINED TO HANNIBAL BEFORE HE SENT FOR YOU AND MR. DRAKE, THERE IS A PASSAGE OF THE DARKHOLD WHICH SOME CALL THE MONTES! FORMULA--!
DIG IT, BLADE... THIS OLD MONK, MONTES!, FOUND A CRUMBLING COPY OF THE DARKHOLD IN THE VATICAN LIBRARY, INCLUDING PART OF A SPELL WHICH TOTALLY DESTROYS VAMPIRES IN CLOSE PROXIMITY.
BUT WITH THE ORIGINAL DARKHOLD AND THE COMPLETE SPELL IN HAND, WE COULD SNUFF OUT VAMPS AROUND THE WORLD.
UH-HUH, AND YOU ALONG WITH 'EM!

LOOK, BLADE, FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH, I "DIED" FOUR YEARS AGO.
THE WAY I LOOK AT IT, I GOT FOUR EXTRA YEARS. AND IF I CAN TAKE THE REST OF MY FELLOW BLOOD-SUCKERS WITH ME WHEN I GO, ALL THE BETTER!
DON'T HAND ME THAT BLOOD-SUCKER GARBAGE KING! YOU'VE NEVER KILLED A MAN FOR HIS BLOOD IN ALL THE TIME YOU'VE BEEN A VAMPIRE! DOESN'T SEEM FAIR THAT YOU HAVE TO GET PULLED DOWN IN THIS.
LIFE ISN'T FAIR, BLADE, WHY SHOULD UNLIFE BE ANY DIFFERENT?

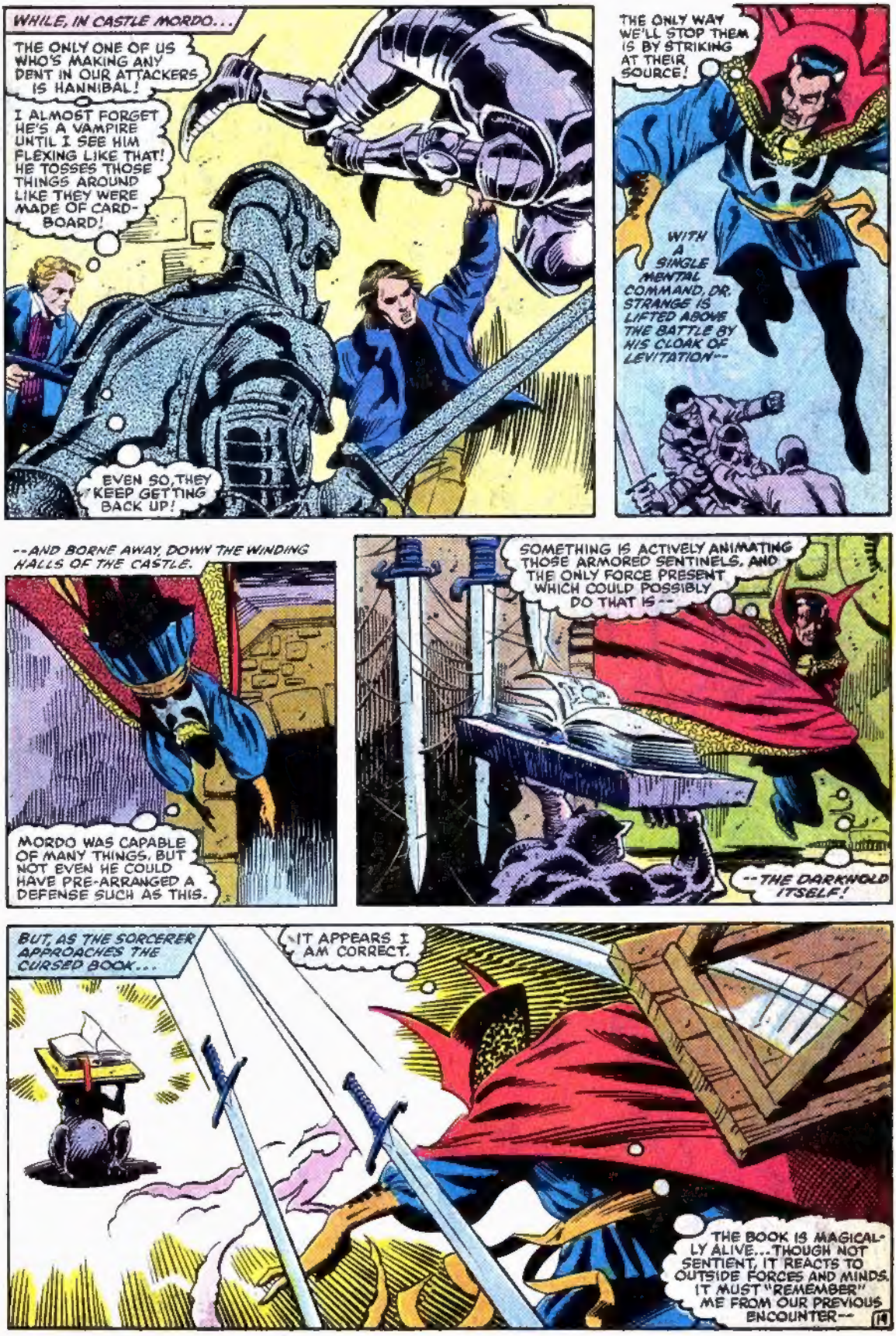
SILENCE FALLS OVER THE TRUCK FOR THE NEXT FEW HOURS. AND THEN ..
HOLEE--!
IS SOMETHING WRONG, MR. DRAKE?
YEAH... NO... I MEAN, I DON'T KNOW

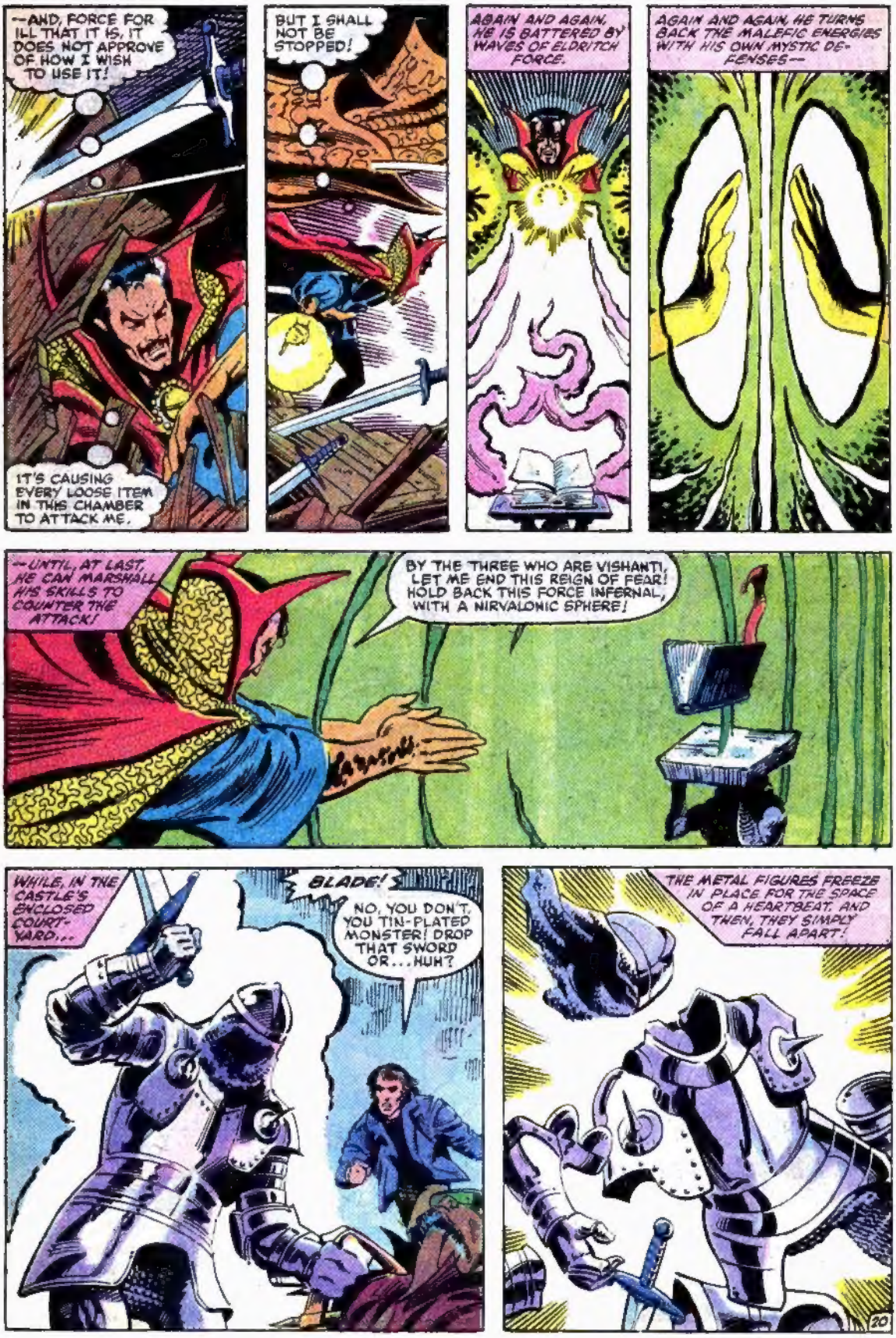
BUT I THINK WE'VE REACHED OUR DESTINATION.
THAT JUST HAS TO BE CASTLE MORDO!

AND IT LOOKS LIKE SOMETHING DOESN'T WANT US HERE!
BEGONE FROM THIS PLACE... OR FACE THE WRATH OF MORDO!!
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, WONG, BUT THAT SOUNDED LIKE A DARE TO ME!
HANG ON, EVERYBODY!
VRRRRRM
GUNNING THE ENGINE, FRANK DRAKE SENDS THE TRUCK ROARING STRAIGHT THROUGH THE MONSTROUS IMAGE--
KRASH
-- AND THE HUGE OAKEN DOORS BEYOND!
HAH! I FIGURED THAT WATCHDOG'S BARK WAS WORSE THAN HIS BITE!
THIS IS NO TIME TO LOWER OUR GUARD, DRAKE!
THAT WARNING WAS BUT AN ILLUSION OF LIGHT AND SOUND... A SPELL CONCOCTED BY THE LATE BARON MORDO TO KEEP INTRUDERS AWAY
BUT THERE IS MORE HERE TO FEAR THAN SIMPLE ILLUSIONS.
HEY, WE KNOW HOW TO BE CAUTIOUS, DOCTOR! YOU JUST TAKE CARE OF THE MAGIC STUFF. I'M SURE WE CAN HANDLE THE --
--PHYSICAL THREATS?!
KA-THUNK

MAYBE I SPOKE TOO SOON. THOSE BOYS LOOK LIKE THEY MEAN BUSINESS.
I THINK YOU'LL FIND "THOSE BOYS" ARE MORE THAN THEY APPEAR TO BE AT FIRST GLANCE!
BY THE WINDS OF WATOOMB, HEED THE POWER I WIELD--
--AND IMPEDE OUR ATTACKERS WITH THE SERAPHIM'S SHIELD!
CALLING UPON MAGICAL FORCES FROM BEYOND THIS WORLD, DR. STRANGE ERECTS A MIGHTY BARRIER--
--BUT TO NO AVAIL! THERE ARE NO MEN WITHIN THESE ARMORED SUITS! THEY MOVE BY MAGIC...A MAGIC GREATER THAN THAT OF THE SHIELD!
THE FAITHFUL WONG EVADES THE CUT OF HARDENED STEEL BY MERE INCHES!
KUNG
YOU'VE HAD YOUR INNING, DOC! WE'LL TAKE IT FROM HERE.
DRAKE, NO! BULLETS WON'T STOP THESE THINGS!
7

AT THAT MOMENT, AT AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT IN ITALY, A U.S. NAVY JET COMES THUNDERING IN FOR A VERY UNSCHEDULED LANDING...
NAVY
SCREEEE
WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS MADMAN? HE DIDN'T RADIO FOR LANDING INSTRUCTIONS -- DIDN'T WAIT FOR CLEARANCE... WOULDN'T EVEN ACKNOWLEDGE THE TOWER ON THE RADIO
I SINCERELY HOPE YOU ARE SUFFERING FROM SOME MAJOR MECHANICAL FAILURE, MY AMERICAN FRIEND. OTHERWISE, YOU ARE MOST CERTAINLY IN BIG TROUBLE!
SIGNORE?
SANTO MADRE! HE IS DEAD! AND ON HIS THROAT... THE MARK OF THE VAMPIRE!
SO SHOCKED IS THE GROUND CREW BY THEIR DISCOVERY THAT THEY DO NOT NOTICE THE MIST WHICH HAD ARISEN FROM THE JET'S CANOPY...
...THE MIST, WHICH EVEN NOW, WAFTS ACROSS THE RUNWAYS IN SEARCH OF FURTHER TRANSPORTATION


WHILE, IN CASTLE MORDO...
THE ONLY ONE OF US WHO'S MAKING ANY DENT IN OUR ATTACKERS IS HANNIBAL!
I ALMOST FORGET HE'S A VAMPIRE UNTIL I SEE HIM FLEXING LIKE THAT! HE TOSSES THOSE THINGS AROUND LIKE THEY WERE MADE OF CARD-BOARD!
EVEN SO, THEY KEEP GETTING BACK UP!
THE ONLY WAY WE'LL STOP THEM IS BY STRIKING AT THEIR SOURCE!
WITH A SINGLE MENTAL COMMAND, DR. STRANGE IS LIFTED ABOVE THE BATTLE BY HIS CLOAK OF LEVITATION--
--AND BORNE AWAY, DOWN THE WINDING HALLS OF THE CASTLE.
MORDO WAS CAPABLE OF MANY THINGS, BUT NOT EVEN HE COULD HAVE PRE-ARRANGED A DEFENSE SUCH AS THIS.
SOMETHING IS ACTIVELY ANIMATING THOSE ARMORED SENTINELS, AND THE ONLY FORCE PRESENT WHICH COULD POSSIBLY DO THAT IS --
--THE DARKHOLD ITSELF!
BUT, AS THE SORCERER APPROACHES THE CURSED BOOK...
IT APPEARS I AM CORRECT.
THE BOOK IS MAGICALLY ALIVE...THOUGH NOT SENTIENT, IT REACTS TO OUTSIDE FORCES AND MINDS. IT MUST "REMEMBER" ME FROM OUR PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER--
14


--AND, FORCE FOR ILL THAT IT IS, IT DOES NOT APPROVE OF HOW I WISH TO USE IT!
IT'S CAUSING EVERY LOOSE ITEM IN THIS CHAMBER TO ATTACK ME.
BUT I SHALL NOT BE STOPPED!
AGAIN AND AGAIN, HE IS BATTERED BY WAVES OF ELDRITCH FORCE.
AGAIN AND AGAIN, HE TURNS BACK THE MALEFIC ENERGIES WITH HIS OWN MYSTIC DEFENSES--
--UNTIL, AT LAST, HE CAN MARSHALL HIS SKILLS TO COUNTER THE ATTACK!
BY THE THREE WHO ARE VISHANTI, LET ME END THIS REIGN OF FEAR! HOLD BACK THIS FORCE INFERNAL, WITH A NIRVALONIC SPHERE!
WHILE, IN THE CASTLE'S ENCLOSED COURTYARD...
BLADE!
NO, YOU DON'T, YOU TIN-PLATED MONSTER! DROP THAT SWORD OR... HUH?
THE METAL FIGURES FREEZE IN PLACE FOR THE SPACE OF A HEARTBEAT. AND THEN, THEY SIMPLY FALL APART!
20

IN THE INNER CHAMBERS, THE SOURCE OF THEIR ANIMATION HAS BEEN CUT OFF. THERE, DR. STRANGE WEARILY TURNS AWAY, DRAINED FROM BATTLING THE DARKHOLD—

--BUT SATISFIED THAT THE TOME'S POWER HAS BEEN RENDERED HARMLESS BY THE GLOWING SPHERE OF NIRVALON.

YES, RENDERED HARMLESS ...FOR NOW.

LATER...

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT NONE OF YOU COME IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE BOOK. EVEN I DARE NOT TOUCH IT UNTIL THE RITUAL BEGINS.

BUT IF YOU CAN'T TOUCH IT, HOW WILL WE KNOW WHAT TO DO FOR THIS RITUAL?

I NEED NOT TOUCH THE DARKHOLD TO READ IT, HANNIBAL.

WITH BUT A GESTURE, THE MYSTIC MASTER CONJURES UP A GENTLE BREEZE WITHIN THE SPHERE, AND, AS THE PAGES TURN, HE DICTATES THE IMPORTANT DETAILS TO HIS MANSERVANT.

WELL, HANNIBAL... WON'T BE LONG NOW. I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW...

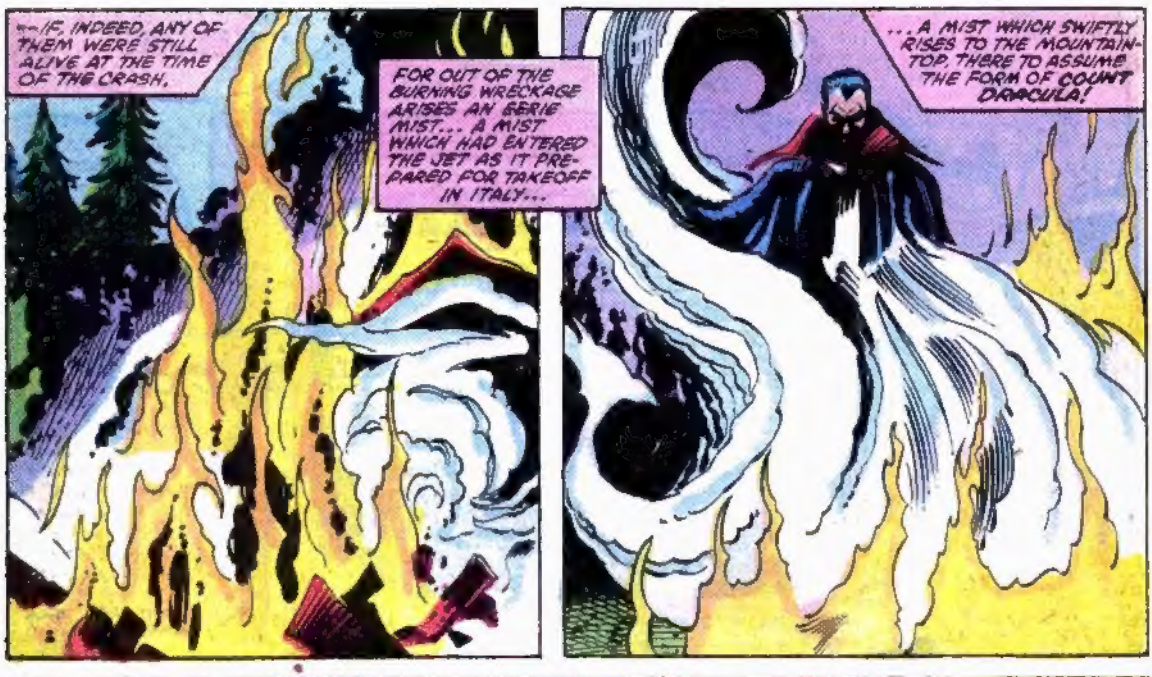
SHHH! LISTEN... DO YOU HEAR THAT?

EH? SOUNDS LIKE...

A JET! NOT TOO FAR OFF!

HIGH ABOVE IN THE DARKENING SKIES, A SOVIET AEROFLOT JETLINER SUDDENLY GOES INTO A SHARP DIVE.

OUT OF CONTROL, IT PLOWS INTO THE ROCKY TRANSYLVANIA ALPS LESS THAN TWENTY MILES FROM CASTLE MORDO.
BUH-WHROOM
THOSE ABOARD ARE KILLED INSTANTLY--


"--IF, INDEED, ANY OF THEM WERE STILL ALIVE AT THE TIME OF THE CRASH.
FOR OUT OF THE BURNING WRECKAGE ARISES AN EERIE MIST... A MIST WHICH HAD ENTERED THE JET AS IT PREPARED FOR TAKEOFF IN ITALY...
...A MIST WHICH SWIFTLY RISES TO THE MOUNTAINTOP, THERE TO ASSUME THE FORM OF COUNT DRACULA!

THE RUSSIAN PILOTS WERE NO HARDER TO MESMERIZE THAN THE AMERICAN! IT WAS SIMPLE TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEM AND COMMAND THEM TO BRING ME HERE.
SO STRANGE HAD THE AUDACITY TO BRING THE DARKHOLD TO THIS, MY NATIVE LAND! A BOLD MOVE, BUT BOLDNESS WILL DO HIM NO GOOD!
MY SENSES GROW EVER STRONGER! I CAN FEEL THE PRESENCE OF THE DARKHOLD! YES, IT CALLS OUT TO ME, LIKE THE FLAME TO THE MOTH!
PERHAPS YOU HAVE THE DARKHOLD NOW, STEPHEN STRANGE! BUT BEFORE THE SUN RISES, IT WILL BE MINE!!
22

NEXT: THE FINAL BATTLE BETWEEN DR. STRANGE AND DRACULA!

"DELIVER US FROM EVIL!"